

## *inside us*

there is a story

it begins with darkness. it begins in a beautiful place. and there is a woman. and somehow it comes to be that this woman falls through a dark hole to another world. and this other world is begun in a beautiful way. the woman gives birth to a child and the death of her body becomes the soil beneath our feet.

she tells of that little one who she carried on her bruised hip  
his blood runs through all our veins  
pumps the rhythm of that beating force inside ones chest  
hers was sweating, bare behind a plainly patterned dress she had worn the day before  
whose buttons were undone, some missing or torn, open anyway in a v formation to  
the crease of her breasts,  
her skin reddened in the heat of that summer evening  
beating down on her even as the sun was setting and her hands were plunged into the lukewarm water rain  
had left in that old tub outback  
bathing her children before he came home

she tells of how that little one was carried  
wet and naked against the soiled apron tie, sticking to that grey blue dress  
she remembers the smell of the corn soup boiling over on the stove, remembers how it  
felt when it spit up from under the lid and hit his face and splattered onto her arm,  
what that torn filthy linoleum beneath his bare baby feet felt like when she put him  
down  
he stood there  
felt the splash of the soup spilling onto the floor reaching for the tops of his toes  
she remembers the sounds that rang inside those grimy yellow kitchen walls while the  
little one cried and bent down to scoop up some of the soup from the dirt on the floor,  
licked it from his finger, the lid to the pot thrown on the counter, dishrag grabbed and  
dropped, feet stomping and lips cursing  
softly  
under her breath  
beneath the sound of his footsteps coming up the back  
feathers left somewhere on the road way back before her time with this great chief  
stumbling up the concrete steps, shaking the iron railing as he fell  
and pulled himself up and into the door  
bloody from the history wars  
staggering in and dragging over the pages of what our grandchildren read  
the fierce half truth of why the blood was shed upon his little feet, tender flesh pushed  
up against a cupboard door sticky from the last time  
empty rage

he stands at the top of the stairs looking down  
naked little body,  
she lies there under his stench on top of the cold basement floor  
and might have died if it hadn't been for the soup still boiling over,  
the baby she carried,

the sound beating outside her chest  
the woman who fell from the sky  
tomorrow  
she whispers how she threw his heavy arm over and pulled herself from underneath  
his whiskey weight  
then slowly climbed those stairs  
shut the basement door

took her youngest ones and trudged alone through the snow and cold  
an old pair of moccasins on her feet  
a child on her back, holding the hands of two more  
heads down and into the force of wind and snow hitting their face  
until she reached the distance safe enough from being thrown down those stairs again  
or out of that door once more  
leaving the towering pines and rocky lakeshore no good for planting  
closer to where she had first come from  
but farther into never telling this story

remember how the beating of a drum somewhere in the distance you took yourself to  
brought you back to where you needed to be  
remember first feeling like it was the farthest place from ever knowing the feeling of  
okay  
flesh opened up and torn and pushed and left empty feeling full of nothing  
for a long time  
beaten numb and never crying  
crying all the time outside planting those fields in the cold and rain and thunder skies  
and in your distance singing those songs and in the rain feeling tears rush down your  
face and tasting that beat on your native tongue

i ploughed through the earth and up into myself i could hear what was inside  
i sang those songs  
like how she still burned sweetgrass when the streets of where they lived housed not a  
pine tree, not a stream to walk barefoot by, where the red skins of her children were  
washed white  
and my own watered down

remember the water your mother used to wash the floors  
hot burning water and bleach scalding her mothers grandmothers hands  
how she rung out the cloth and scrubbed that floor  
how silent she was in that world she entered in that house where he stood somewhere  
not anywhere at all really  
but steady  
through all our veins his blood carrying what he would turn away from  
the hardness of that filthy floor, the tender flesh touching it, those hardened hands that  
strangled and pushed that tenderness she was, but never knowing this because of  
the fight, because fighting makes you hard, calluses your skin,  
numbs the insides  
i remember the story of what we are on the inside  
i remember because i felt it that first time i walked around the sacred fire in my  
barefeet, the floor of the grassy earth soft and cool beneath my young skin, circling

round the light, the singing and the drumbeat felt up into my roots, my stem,  
and was my own heart beating out there, inside  
i remember grandmother moon  
her grandchildren

*I used to build forts down by the river, I made a medicine pouch and hung it around my neck. I sewed the leather and filled it up inside. There is an ancientness there, it is in the circle, and I was in the centre. I would never see my father drink what had seeped into our Native blood. And though we would still have to leave him, quietly, steadily, he stood beside me there in that middle place, listened, waited, watched the wind blow in that ancientness seemingly missing. He brought me deer hide to make a bag for my drum. He walks with me, and honours what I have to teach.*

how do i share words that live on the wings of spirit  
that have no english reason  
reason does not touch deep enough  
and i am stranger to the voice of my grandmother  
and if she sung the songs  
i sing  
voice the sound of what i know inside  
sound out voice  
all that was known before our fall  
all that needs to be said  
even when they'd rather not hear it

those ancient grandmothers  
i am sure they spoke the truth  
felt the truth and were not afraid of the bellowing movement of their voice over the deafening drumbeat of sometimes nothing  
sometimes there is nothing there  
and it speaks louder  
sometimes  
no one speaks to her  
no one dances in the circle, but strangers glad to see a familiar face  
sometimes  
tripping over untied moccasin laces  
she ties her laces tighter  
ties the leather lacing in a bow  
double knot  
good strong soles on those moccasins  
she's looked  
best she's seen yet  
she feels that strength on the bottom of her barefeet  
holds her up

his words sometimes say nothing  
he'd rather know nothing  
gravity pulls us down

those moccasins

her grandmother made moccasins  
they hold her up  
those feet  
they just keep carrying her forward

and out there somewhere in the distance of her remembering and foretelling  
her grandmother waves to her  
holds her hand to her forehead  
shades out the sun  
indian eyes to see her  
tell the stories

*Laura Schwager*